

STRICTURES
ON
MR. BEECHAM'S ESSAY
ON THE
CONSTITUTION
OF
WESLEYAN METHODISM.

SECOND EDITION.

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STRICTURES,

&c.

THE avowed object of this writer is to “vindicate Methodism,” not in its original state, as constituted by Mr. Wesley, but “in its present form,” with all its recent modifications and improvements; its essential and fundamental principle being invariably, That all the societies in that connection are and were originally placed under the supreme controul of Conference; that all the laws and regulations for the government of the whole body emanate from that source, and that the people have no independent rights, or rights of any kind, but what are conceded by authority of Conference.—This, Mr. Beecham assures us, is the very stratum of Methodism.

In proof of this he appeals to the minutes of Conference in 1763, which determine that the local assemblies have “no directing or controuling power in spiritual affairs, for they are placed exclusively in the hands of the circuit preachers. A leaders’ meeting have no voice in admitting or excluding a member of society, or one of their own fraternity; neither can they interfere in the appointment or removal of stewards or any other officer, or have any share in the management of public worship; all these are vested in the superintendent by authority of conference.” Instead of concealing the prostrate condition of methodism, this dutiful son, not ashamed of its nakedness, proceeds to inform us that so far from the local officers being allowed to exercise any degree of authority, “the leaders themselves were directed to sit in silence (in awful silence no doubt) on their assembling together, until the preacher entered the room; and during the meeting they were not allowed to speak a single word, except in answer to a question from the preacher or steward.”

In the conference of 1771 it was ordained, "that a leader has authority only to meet his class, and receive their contributions; that an assembly of leaders are only to show their class papers to the preachers, and deliver the money collected to the stewards. They have no authority to restrain an irregular preacher, to displace a leader, or expel any one from society; all these things are confided to the assistant preacher. They are not permitted to regulate the temporal or spiritual concerns of the society, neither the one nor the other." A pretty dilemma for the primitive methodists! Nevertheless, though they had nothing to do with the laws but to obey them, they were to have the peculiar privilege of providing all the funds; and if they could but furnish the money, wisdom would elsewhere be found to direct its application.

It was impossible that things could long continue in such a state, without producing great dissatisfaction; for however willing the people might be to submit to the management of Mr. Wesley and those immediately about him, it would be far otherwise when the government passed into other hands. A system which deprived them of all their rights, and transferred them to a spiritual aristocracy, could have no claim to their admiration; sooner or later it would provoke enquiry, if not a feeling of resentment for the degradation it had inflicted. The whole series of methodism, like an inverted cone, is based upon a single point—the ecclesiastic is every thing, and the people nothing; the machinery is all working above, grinding them to powder. According to Mr. Wesley's account, as stated by this writer, "the wheels regularly stand thus: first the assistant or superintendent, next the local preachers, then the stewards, the leaders, and the people." The wheels however could not be expected to "stand" long in this position, without being in danger of standing still; an accidental contact with some in the factory, producing serious mischief, would bring on a regular inquest, and a deodand would be demanded. Mr. Beecham indeed acknow-

ledges that the machinery did not work so well as could have been wished, and that it needed some alteration or repair; and soon after the decease of Mr. Wesley loud complaints were heard among the people, whose remonstrances did not fail to agitate the whole connection. The conference was at length induced to make some concessions in 1795, and also in 97, which, though they did not amount to a full surrender of the rights claimed by the people, proved an alleviation of their bondage.

In examining these concessions Mr. Beecham is anxious the people should know what obligations they are under to their spiritual rulers, and how large the boon their generosity has conferred; he never dreams that any encroachment was or could at any time be made on their rights and privileges, by those who had seated themselves on the throne of methodism; every concession is perfectly free and gratuitous. A change was however introduced into the general discipline, which in some measure reduced its exorbitancy. Instead of the superintendent minister having the sole power of receiving and expelling members on his own authority, he can now do neither without consent of a leaders' meeting; nor can leaders or stewards be henceforth appointed or removed, without the concurrence of the class leaders. The circuit stewards also are allowed a share in the pecuniary transactions of the society, and form a part of the various committees of finance, from which they were formerly excluded. All these are stated as concessions made by "the liberality of conference:" yet in the hands of this writer the whole is frittered down to a mere permission for the local officers and members to be consulted on certain occasions, without allowing them any direct or effective vote on the subject brought before them; a sort of mock committee, whose determination may be totally disregarded. "They form a kind of council to the superintendent," says Mr. Beecham, "with whom he converses on the state of the society; but his authority is not shared with the local meetings, nor are they constituted

judges along with him ;” and of course, if they are not to “judge,” the consultation is a mere farce.

The party making these concessions had expressly declared, “that there is now no society officer among us who can be received, without consent of the meeting to which he particularly belongs ; nor can any officer be removed, except upon the same plan.” If there be any meaning in language, this must imply, that the admission or exclusion of a member in any part of the connection can only be effected through the suffrage of those already in fellowship ; and as the local preachers are doubtless some of the principal officers, they can neither be received nor excluded without the concurrence of their brethren at a local preachers meeting, “to which they particularly belong.” Yet in the Leeds case local preachers were excluded, not only without, but against the consent of their brethren ; and this is the case which it is attempted by implication to justify. Mr. Beecham having put himself forward as the special advocate of a party, acting in direct violation of the rules and regulations adopted in 1797, finds it convenient to deny their plain and obvious import, and to put upon them a different and opposite construction. With singular inconsistency he asserts, “that the rule relating to the admission of local preachers, does not extend to their *expulsion* ;” their brethren can receive but not retain any of them, if it be the pleasure of other persons to put them away. Any thing to secure the predominance of the priesthood answers the purpose of such a writer, even though it should make mere cyphers of the people, and reduce the regulations themselves to sheer nonsense. If the local preachers, or any other class in society, can be dealt with in the way that is pretended, there is a total end to all christian fellowship, which if it be not voluntary can have no existence.

Not understanding the rights of conscience himself, nor the worth of civil and religious liberty, Mr. Beecham wishes to insinuate that those who assailed the power of conference in 1795 and 97,

were the abettors of the French revolution; and that their disaffection was occasioned by spurious notions of equality and independence which prevailed at that period. He even mixes up these persons with the infidels of the age, and the fifth monarchy men in the time of Cromwel; and for the mere purpose of shielding the precious 'apostolicals,' and securing to them in perpetuity the keys of St. Peter, he attempts to degrade a numerous and respectable portion of the Wesleyan society, by a gross misrepresentation of their religious and political sentiments. Had the conference viewed the conduct and motives of the complainants in the same light, or considered them as influenced by secular ambition and discontent, would they have entertained their application, or listened to their remonstrance? Would they in their circular of 1797 have made "the sacrifices they did of their authority, in order to evince a willingness," as they said, "to meet their brethren in every thing consistent with the existence of methodist discipline, and shown a readiness to become their servants for Jesus' sake?" The reflections of this writer fall alike on the conference whom he is anxious to extol, and upon the people whom he wishes to traduce. There is indeed, throughout the whole of his performance, such a perpetual din about "the powers and prerogatives of conference, the legislative rights of conference, the laws and enactments of conference, the supreme authority of conference, and conference being the head of the methodist body the church,"—that we were perfectly stunned and stupefied with the bell of this dustman, and could only make out that he has no sympathy with the friends of popular freedom, and has little else in view than magnifying and extolling the men who sit in Moses's chair, and occupy the chief places in the synagogue. He troubles not himself about the numerous seceders in the north or in the south, is unaware of the growing dissatisfactions in other parts of the connection, and of the issue to which things are tending; and if the dominant system be at last

compelled to give way, the event will be accelerated by such advocates as Mr. Beecham, who instead of providing a remedy, or suggesting any healing measures, encreases the danger tenfold, by stoutly denying the existence of disease, and maintaining that things are all as they ought to be. This is the way that all the ultras go on, both in church and state, till they and their corruptions are swept away by the torrent of public opinion.

Mr. Beecham has been careful to reiterate the power and authority of christian pastors, and their right to rule the church, but has studiously avoided all definition of the terms, except that they are not to rule "imperiously or tyrannically," which vaguely concedes any degree of authority that priestly arrogance might choose to assume. Neither Laud nor Bonner thought they were acting tyrannically, but according to the power that God had given them, in sending heretics to the dungeon and the stake; and a methodist minister, with his associates, may think the same, in excluding hundreds and thousands from communion for the sake of an organ, and displaying their own authority; but both God and the people will be their judge.

This gentleman has dwelt so much among episcopal and popish writers, and imbibed such notions of high-church power and influence, that he has shown himself totally incapable of understanding this part of his subject. No one denies that the scriptures teach submission to pastoral authority, or that we are to 'obey those who have the rule over us;' but it is necessary to ascertain the nature and extent of that obedience, before it can become a reasonable service, or form any part of the will of God. If this submission is to be a religious and not a servile submission, it must be a submission to divine and not to human authority; and before it can be such the people must be convinced that it is according to the scriptures, which involves the right of enquiry, both as to the import and obligation of pastoral injunctions. Take away the right of judging, and all conviction ceases, and with it

all rational obedience. Christians are bound to obey nothing but the truth, nothing but this can bind the conscience. Authority to rule and govern in the church is ministerial only, not legislative, and the power of a pastor lies in his doctrine and example. Christ himself is the only lawgiver of the church ; all his laws are recorded in the scriptures, none besides can have any force, or possess any legitimate authority. Should a conference or a synod pretend to make laws where he has made none, fidelity to him requires they should be rejected. ' Teaching for doctrine the commandments of men, makes void the law,' and destroys the very nature of christian obedience. Yet by a strange perversion this writer maintains that submission to pastoral authority, to be sincere, must be implicit ; and that if it arises from a conviction that what is commanded is according to the will of God, it is an obedience to divine rather than to pastoral authority. Before however he can consistently demand this kind of subjection, he must establish his claim to infallibility ; the man who confesses himself liable to err, and at the same time requires implicit submission to his authority, betrays at once his ignorance of human nature, and his love of domination.

So much vaunting about the power of the priesthood, and the right to implicit obedience, naturally creates suspicion that something is rotten in the present state of methodism, and suggests the necessity of farther enquiry. Nothing like these high pretensions is to be found in any part of the new testament. The great and good Shepherd was among his disciples ' as one that serveth ;' being meek and lowly in heart he did not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax ; and he hath left us an example that we should follow his steps. The great apostle of the gentiles was among his brethren as a nurse that cherisheth her children, willing to impart not the gospel of God only, but his own soul also, because they were dear unto him. And would *he* have made a schism among them for the sake of a psaltery or a harp ; he who declared

that if meat made his brother to offend, he would eat no flesh while the world standeth? Do we hear the same apostle beseeching and persuading his brethren by the meekness and gentleness of Christ to receive his counsel: and shall we listen to the dogmatising of a methodist preacher on the subject of pains and penalties, in case *his* authority should be disregarded? Are his dictates so infallible that the people have no right to examine them, or to judge of his pretensions, in order to ascertain the extent of their obligations? How strange it is he does not perceive the difference between the claims of inspired men, and those of ordinary teachers. The authority of the former being peculiar, could not descend to others, but ceased with the age of inspiration. To have rejected the authority of the apostles, would have been an abandonment of christianity itself; but the authority of an uninspired teacher cannot surely be placed on the same footing. Yet we find that the exercise of power, even on the part of these highly-gifted men, was marked with the utmost tenderness and forbearance, very unlike to that of their pretended successors. It seemed good 'to the Holy Ghost,' and equally so to them, that no other burden should be laid on the churches than such as arose from 'necessary things;' on points not obviously within the design of the gospel, or not essential to christianity, they were content to give their counsel and advice, but they forbore to command. Far from being 'lords over God's heritage,' they pleased all men to their edification, and became all things to all men that they might gain some.

Our author professes to be acquainted with the English constitution, and deals in quotations from Blackstone's commentaries, for the purpose of assimilating certain parts of methodist discipline with civil law, and likening the conference to the high court of parliament! But where did he learn the doctrine of passive obedience and nonresistance, of passive obedience and nonresistance it may be to a preacher who neither understands the principles of

civil or religious liberty, nor the nature and constitution of a christian church ; and who instead of recognising that lovely equality which Christ has established among his followers, is all intent on exalting the priesthood, and sinking the importance of the people. When we hear a pope thundering from the vatican, and an archbishop threatening to “coerce” the subjects of his diocese, with a bundle of canon law in his pocket and the sword of the civil magistrate by his side, it is easy to comprehend their meaning ; but for a Wesleyan minister, with the minutes of conference in his hand, to talk of being “armed with spiritual authority to coerce those into submission whom he is sent to teach,” presents a spectacle of singular novelty. We may truly wonder in what school he has studied “the genius of Christ’s kingdom,” and from what gospel he has derived his notions of coercion.

In the primitive church nothing was to be done ‘by constraint, but willingly ;’ the idea of coercion was never entertained till it was wanted to support an antichristian church, where almost every thing is done by compulsion, and scarcely any thing left to the choice of a ready mind. Schemes for compelling men to become religious are of a much later discovery, a method of advancing the kingdom of Christ which was not within the reach of apostolic wisdom. A christian church is a congregation of faithful men ; all its fellowship arises from a sameness of faith, a sameness of experience and of hope ; a holy brotherhood for whom Christ died, knowing nothing at all of coercion ; it is founded on the opposite principle, that of voluntary compact and mutual affection, giving themselves first to the Lord, and then to one another for his sake. According to the doctrine laid down by Mr. Beecham, that all rule and authority in the church is placed in the hands of the pastor, and not in the people, it would come to pass that where there is no pastor, there can be no church, no power to execute the commands of Christ. If half a score persons in a village should happen to be converted by reading the

scriptures, or some religious tracts accidentally distributed among them, and they should enter into fellowship together, to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless ; they could neither receive nor exclude members from communion, nor execute any part of christian discipline. Taking the scriptures for their guide, they edify one another in love ; and walking in the fear of God and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost, they are multiplied ; yet having no ruling priest among them, all they do is uncanonical, and they must be set down for a parcel of schismatics !

This zealous advocate of ecclesiastical dominion having shown, as he conceives, that the government of the church is wholly vested in the pastor, proceeds to enquire into the distinguishing characteristic of such an officer ; and finds it not to consist, eminently, in any mental or moral endowment, but in something extraneous and accidental, something in which he is supposed to differ from the local preacher. The latter, we are told, engages only occasionally, but the pastor is "actually and entirely given up to the work ;" and of course, if he preached five times in a day, as Whitfield sometimes did, he would be something more than a pastor. Bearing in mind also that the local preachers generally follow the ordinary occupations of life, they are carefully kept in the back ground to give prominence to the pastor, who comes forward as a gentleman, "whose sustenance is to be provided for him without any care of his own," living like a levitical priest on tithes and offerings. This is highly ingenious no doubt, but in point of sagacity it is scarcely equal to the decision of a leader in a dissenting congregation, well known to the writer, who stated it as his grave opinion, that the great requisite in a good pastor was a stout pair of legs. There was some sense surely in this, the pious man well considering that the minister would be able to perform his itinerant labours with the greater ease ; but who would have thought it characteristic of a christian pastor, that he must

necessarily be secluded from secular concerns, and live like one of the sons of Aaron or of Levi. That those who ‘serve the altar should live by the altar,’ is the language both of reason and revelation; but it is wondrous strange if a claim of this sort cannot be forborne, without incurring the forfeiture of all pastoral pretensions. When honest John Bunyan was accused by some in his day, of receiving a salary as pastor of the church at Bedford, he gloried in asserting his independence. “Though I be poor, said he, and of no repute in the world, as to outward things, yet this grace I have learned, by the example of the apostle, to preach the truth, and also to work with my hands, both for my own living and for those that are with me.” And perhaps he was as good a pastor after all as Mr. Beecham, or any of his associates, though he sometimes mended pots and kettles.

Mr. Beecham is anxious to make it out, that “the regular preachers,” being supported by the contributions of the people, “are the only legitimate pastors of the methodist flock.” In primitive times however, none were considered as pastors but those who resided with the flock, and had the charge of a particular congregation. The pastors were not removable from one district to another, like the travelling preachers in the Wesleyan connection; their work was more stationary, and confined to a more limited sphere. They were the elders and pastors of the church at Corinth, and Ephesus, at Philippi, or elsewhere, distinguished from the apostles and evangelists, who carried the tidings of salvation to all nations. When in any town or city a number of individuals were converted by their instrumentality, they were constituted the depositaries of the truth received, and charged with its dissemination in their immediate neighbourhood, while the itinerants passed into other regions to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. The first converts in any place, being the constituents of a new society, would in a little time become its presbytery, out of whom one would naturally be select-

ed as the president or pastor of the flock, the rest acting in concert as elders or deacons. In this view, which is supported by the history of the Acts and the earliest records of the church, the resident class leaders and local preachers in the Wesleyan societies form the real presbytery; and if any one of these were nominated by their brethren to the general oversight of the flock, he would properly be their pastor, rather than the travelling preacher who is performing the work of an evangelist.

Our author however has other objections to the leaders and local preachers being considered as pastors of the flock, besides those already mentioned; and these form so sickening a piece of affectation as is seldom to be met with. He attempts to distinguish between the different degrees and orders of teaching, to show what is canonical and what is not, always taking it for granted that "the regular preacher" is a wiser man than all the rest. "The teaching of the class leader is of the humbler order, confined to the subject of christian experience," which by the bye requires more wisdom and prudence than many other kinds of teaching. "The local preacher engages only occasionally, in some of the smaller chapels, and does not formally address the whole society:" if he did, and preached oftener, there would be danger of mistaking him for a pastor! "The business of the circuit preacher is to teach both the leader and the local preacher," that is to say, if he be able. He also engages, forsooth, "in the highest kind of teaching, in all the senses in which a minister is required to teach; and in all those senses he teaches the whole flock, and its subordinate teachers too!" Well, well, sir, this is quite enough, quite as much as modesty will bear: nobody after this will presume to question your being a teacher in the fullest and highest sense, understanding all mysteries and all knowledge! But this is not all: the secret is not yet out, why the leaders and other localists are not to be considered as eligible to the pastoral office, and why they are not to have any share in managing the

concerns of the society. Their teaching and preaching only occasionally, and in smaller assemblies, implies no necessary inferiority either in talents or piety : no, this is not the reason, though so pompously announced. The truth is, you are afraid of their numbers, their talents and their influence : they would have a preponderance in the connection, and might possibly upset all the legitimates. This is the secret, and you have inadvertently let it out in page 104. "What they ask for, you say, in the system which they recommend, is in fact, that the local preachers and the class leaders shall be recognised as co-pastors, along with the regular preachers, and thus have an equal share, or rather the whole, (FOR THEY COULD EVER CARRY THEIR POINT BY A MAJORITY) of the government of the society." There it is, and this is the clue to all that you have written about pastoral authority, to all that you have said and sung about the glorious ascendancy and supreme dominion of conference ; though it is not true that either the leaders or local preachers have recommended any new system of methodism, or claimed for themselves any participation in the pastoral office.

All that these complainants have ever demanded is, that they should be treated as members of the church, having a voice in all that concerns its welfare ; that they should not be put down as mere ciphers, forming a mock council to give advice which the minister is at liberty to reject ; that they shall not be trampled upon by a special district meeting, or any other self-constituted authority, pretending a right to enter their local communities, and reverse all the resolutions previously adopted. The privilege they claim is no other than was fully admitted by the conference of 97, no other than is guaranteed by the charter of christianity, by the practice of primitive times, and by the nature and fitness of things ; and it is now too late to think of uprooting a principle so fundamental to all voluntary compact in civilised society. Mr. Beecham does not undertake to investigate this right, he is

afraid to look at it, and afraid to meet the "South London Address;" he therefore contents himself with affirming, that God has placed the government of the church in the hands of its pastors, and that methodism, by transferring the whole to conference, has done the same; thinking no doubt it is a fine thing for "the clergy" to legislate for "the laity," and at the same time to decide on their own pretensions.

Before he could ascend this climax however, it was necessary to secure an exclusive title to the clerical character, to secularise the local preachers, and put on his robes to show that he was not one of them. The itinerants therefore are placed in the calendar as "regular preachers," in episcopal language, "the regular clergy;" the local preachers are of an inferior order, and called "lay preachers," a distinction which marks several parts of this high-church performance. Yet the author might have known that the reverend founder of methodism would have allowed of no such difference; being himself a member of the national church, he considered all as lay preachers who had not been episcopally ordained; this aspirant for clerical honours must therefore be numbered with the rest. And why cannot a Wesleyan preacher be content with his simple designation; why must he affect the stile and significance of a throne-begirt establishment, and look down upon his humbler brethren as men of an inferior order. He dreads "the sin of democracy," and thinks that neither church nor state can be safe without a politico-ecclesiastical hierarchy, if so be that he may but himself be one of the privileged order. Primitive christianity needed no such expedient; and it was not until the suffrages of the people were dispensed with, to make way for the exercise of pastoral authority, that popery gained any footing in the church.

As this writer has neither time nor inclination to make himself acquainted with the history of the primitive church, which is the best comment on its constitution and discipline, we will furnish for his

edification a brief extract, from an author of acknowledged celebrity, hoping it may induce him to retract the servile principles he has endeavoured to palm upon the unsuspecting reader for the verities of methodism. "That the people had in the first ages," says the Rev. Robert Hall, in one of his Reviews, "a large share in ecclesiastical proceedings, and that their officers were chosen by themselves, is incontrovertibly evident, as well from scripture, as from the authentic monuments of antiquity. The epistles of St. Cyprian, to go no farther, are as full in proof of this point, as if they had been written on purpose to establish it. The transfer of power, first from the people to their ministers, and afterwards from them to the bishop of Rome, was a gradual work, not fully accomplished till many centuries had elapsed from the christian era. Until the conversion of Constantine, the christian church was a spiritual republic, subsisting in the midst of the Roman empire, on which it was completely independent; and its most momentous affairs were directed by popular suffrage."

Lord King also, in his *Enquiry into the Constitution and Discipline of the Primitive Church*, has shown that during the first three centuries, nothing was transacted without the concurrence of the people. If a bishop or pastor died, they all met together in one place to choose a successor, and this was the custom throughout all the churches. Thus it is said by Eusebius, bk. vi. ch. 38, Sabinus was chosen bishop of Emerita "by the suffrage of all the brethren." Alexander was chosen bishop of Jerusalem, "by the members of the church." Fabianus was elected bishop of Rome, and after him Cornelius, "by the suffrage of the presbytery and the people." Cyprian of Carthage acknowledged that he was chosen "by favour of the people;" and from the time said he "that I was made their bishop, I determined to do nothing without the consent of my people." In the year 258 it was agreed by a large assembly met on the occasion, that to make an ordination "just and lawful, it

must be approved by the suffrage and judgment of all the people." And in this, says lord King, "they followed the example of the apostles and apostolic men, who ordained none but with the approbation of the whole church." And if even a messenger was to be sent to a distant church, all the people met together to make the appointment. Enquiry, ch. ii.

The admission and exclusion of members, and the general discipline of the church, were all conducted on the same principle. Clement of Rome, as early as the year 70, calls the censures of the church "the things commanded by the multitude." And at Carthage, when mention is made of two members that had offended, Cyprian says "they were to be tried before the whole people, and that none are to be restored to fellowship without their knowledge and consent." Not only were the pastors and teachers elected by the people, but they also deposed such as were disapproved, and appointed others in their stead. When two Spanish bishops were excluded by the people for their apostasy, a synod approved and confirmed their conduct, assuring them that "they had not acted irregularly in what they had done; since as the people had the power of choosing worthy bishops, so also of refusing those that are unworthy." In a time of severe persecution, while Cyprian was in exile, and several members of the church at Carthage had relapsed, but wished afterwards to be restored, he entreated the presbyters acting in his absence, and whom he stiled "the pastors of the flock," to receive them; and in a letter on this occasion, addressed to Cornelius bishop of Rome, he writes as follows. "Oh, my dear brother, if you could have been present when those men returned from their schism, you would have wondered at the pains I took to persuade our brethren to be patient, and laying aside their indignation would consent to the healing and receiving those that are sick; for I can scarcely persuade, or extort a grant from my people, that such should be restored to

communion." And in another place he acknowledges, that "whoever was excommunicated, it was by the divine suffrage of the people." Cyp. Ep. 55, 68.

That the people have a right to be consulted in all the transactions of a christian society, and that nothing should be done without their consent, is not only fully recognised in the early history of the church, but abundantly confirmed by apostolic precept and example. All the canonical epistles are addressed to the churches, including their pastors, but to the churches primarily, and to the pastors only consequentially; the directions respecting discipline and order are therefore given more immediately to them, and to their officers inclusively, which shows that the whole church is charged with the execution of discipline, and not an official part of it in contradistinction from the rest. Paul, in his letter to the church at Rome, addresses the people thus: 'Him that is weak in the faith receive *ye*—Receive *ye* one another as Christ also received us—Receive *ye* Phebe in the Lord as becometh *saints*.' Receiving to communion, and excluding from fellowship, must be the joint act of the whole society. Hence Paul, in his epistles to the church at Corinth, exhorts them, 'When *ye* are gathered together, deliver such a one to Satan—Put away from among *yourselves* that wicked person.' And when the church are directed to restore to their fellowship the excluded party on repentance, they are to 'comfort him and confirm *their* love towards him;' adding, 'to whom *ye* forgive any thing, I forgive also.'

Mr. Beecham indeed alleges as a set off, that the admonitions addressed to the 'angels' of the seven churches in Asia, are a proof that the government was confined to the pastors. Nothing however can be more shallow than this. The work of reformation and amendment required in those churches, concerned the people themselves primarily, and the pastors as forming a part of their community, and being alike involved in the censures and

commendations. At the head of all these epistles, the sacred writer places this inscription: 'John to the seven churches which are in Asia;' and at the end of each is added, 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.' The epistles themselves therefore are addressed to the churches, as indeed their contents evidently show, and to the ministers only as their representatives, and holding an official situation among them. Much of the defection complained of was probably owing to their example, and it was proper therefore that in the first instance they should receive the admonition. We read of no one in the scriptures who 'loved to have the preeminence,' except it be Diotrephes, who thought he had a right to 'cast men out of the church' on his own authority.

Not knowing how to get entirely rid of the suffrages of the people, in order to establish an ecclesiastical despotism in the church, Mr. Beecham is for compromising the matter; and as he cannot allow the members in communion to have any direct influence in the proceedings of the society, he is for admitting them in the capacity of spectators, witnessing and beholding the wisdom and authority of their rulers. For this purpose he brings down the primitive church to the level of a methodist society, makes it nothing but a mock committee, and throws in the character of inspired teachers with that of modern pastors, to render the comparison complete. "The ministers of the primitive church," he tells us, "consulted the wiser and more experienced part of their charge, who assisted them, in various ways, in the important work; and they transacted some church matters in the face of the church, whose presence was thus a check on them against any temptation to abuse their authority and act improperly!" p. 99. What a monstrosity is this! Who would expect any thing like truth or correctness from such a writer. If the Wesleyan preachers, placed on the pinnacle of power, needed a "check" to prevent the abuse of their authority, and to be awed by the presence of the people from acting impro-

perly, surely he might have spared the holy apostles this base reflection, and not have placed them under the surveillance of a committee to keep them honest. The love of power, and the idolising of a system must have been inveterate, before it could come to this, and of such a one there can be no hope. Instead therefore of noticing all the absurdities which abound in the Essay on Wesleyan Methodism, we shall put an end to these remarks, recommending to the notice of Mr. Beecham the unanswerable Reply to Mr. Watson's Address, containing a Defence of Wesleyan Methodism, against the modern Assumptions of Ministerial Power—a *cheap edition* of which has just been printed for general circulation.

Whether methodism was originally founded on the principles stated in the preseding paragraphs, or whether it distinctly recognised any of them or not, it is now become necessary to bring them more prominently to view, seeing there has been a wider and still wider departure from the practice of the primitive church, and an arrogant assumption of power by the advocates of the modern system, which goes at once to annihilate the rights of the people. The venerable Founder of methodism designed no doubt to blend, as far as possible, the advantages presented by the various existing forms of church government, without taking any of them for his model; and the spirit of methodism is best preserved by following this example. A pertinacity for ancient rites and forms, of merely human origin, is one of the worst of human prejudices, and too often obstructs the career of improvement. Man's work is never perfect, all our institutions are undergoing a change, and wisdom requires their encreasing adaptation to the purposes they were intended to accomplish. Methodism has already undergone various modifications, and still demands a closer revision; it is not what it has been, nor what it ought to be, and it were folly to deny it. Its excellency lies not in its being either primitive or modern, but in its conformity to the scriptures.

and be no longer entangled with this yoke of bondage. Let them resume their rights and privileges, and not be pensioners on a body which knows nothing of justice or moderation. In order to effect a most important reformation, little more seems necessary in the first instance, than to secure the complete independance of the *local* meetings in all *local* affairs; that is of the Quarterly Meetings in Circuit affairs, of the Leaders' Meetings in Society affairs, and of the Local Preachers' Meetings in the ministerial department and spiritual administration of the Circuit. The Itinerancy must of course be left with the Conference. But their *legislative* power should either be placed under the restraint of a lower house of assembly, consisting of Laymen exclusively, whose approval or rejection should be absolutely required; or what were infinitely better, the Conference should have power only to recommend a regulation, and leave it to be adopted or rejected by the Quarterly Meetings, who alone should have power to enforce it. Affairs of general interest to the Connection, as the Missions, &c. might be managed by mixt Committees of laymen and preachers, but the lay members should invariably be chosen by the people, and the greatest care taken that the clerical interest do not preponderate in these Committees. An assembly of brethren, ardently attached to each other, and supremely devoted to the Lord, will be well able to conduct the concerns entrusted to their care, and will form a holy family in which peace and love may constantly prevail.

